

Assessing the Public's Perceptions towards Indianapolis' Sports Imagery

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When marketing a destination, it is important to study how people perceive a destination. If there is a gap between people's perceptions and what a destination offers, strategies will be needed to close the gap or to improve the perceptions. This research involves understanding people's perceptions towards Indianapolis and researching if the sports imagery that the city has developed has been effective for its sports tourism. Indianapolis has focused on creating an identity for itself since the 1970s. This identity hinged on sports—auto racing, amateur sports, and major sporting events. Indianapolis began to grow: skyscrapers graced the new skyline, the Colts became the first NFL franchise in the state, major businesses such as Eli Lilly moved operations to the city, local communities and infrastructure were developed. This study investigated how these changes were perceived by both Hoosiers and visitors. To identify the images the public associated with Indianapolis, a total of 75 in-depth interviews were conducted by students as a class project. When asked to indicate what comes to mind while thinking of Indianapolis, responses fell all over the spectrum. Many mentioned the Indy 500 and the Indianapolis Colts, some described Indianapolis as a small, boring city, and a few cited images of violence and racism. About 88 percent of interviewees said the city has become more attractive, but almost 33 percent said they would not visit Indianapolis for leisure. Around 90 percent of respondents said there are strong links between Indianapolis and sport, and about 68 percent of interviewees said these links have been strengthened within the last 10 years. Although the study findings show the city's efforts to become a sports tourism destination have worked, the results of this research highlight some gaps that need further efforts by the city.

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